

PETRIFIED LOG STATION (Thunderbird Tavern)
503 Apache Drive
Holbrook
Navajo County
Arizona

HABS No. AZ-163

HABS
ARIZ
9-HOLB,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Western Region
Department of the Interior
San Francisco, California 94107

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

PETRIFIED LOG STATION

(Thunderbird Tavern)

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Location:

503 Apache Drive, Holbrook, Navajo County, Arizona.

Significance:

The Petrified Log Station is significant for its association with the tourism industry in Holbrook, for its outstanding architectural use of local petrified wood, and for its association with the prominent Ortega family.

Tourist attractions such as the Painted Desert, Petrified Forest, and the Navajo and Hopi Indian Reservations had long captured the attention of tourists riding the rails of the Santa Fe Railroad. With the advent of automobile transportation in the teens and twenties, these attractions became accessible to an even greater number of visitors. In 1914, the State of Arizona constructed a bridge across the Little Colorado at Holbrook, but it was damaged in a 1915 flood and replaced. State Route 77, which passed in front of the Petrified Log Station, crossed the replacement bridge constructed in 1915. The legendary Route 66, famous in song and screen, passed east/west through Holbrook. These transportation routes spawned a streetscape of tourist courts, rock shops, service stations, and restaurants which soon dotted the landscape of Holbrook. The Petrified Log Station is an excellent representative of the distinctive architecture associated with these roadside tourist attractions.¹

The Petrified Log Station is also significant for its association with the pioneering Ortega family of northern Arizona. Originally from New Mexico, the Ortegas got their start in Arizona as sheep ranchers in Concho. Sheep ranchers in Concho brought with them the famous Merino stock of New Mexico which found a niche in the plateau country of northern Arizona. Easy transportation on the railroad and an increase in sheep prices during the last decades of the 19th century meant prosperity for the Hispanic sheep ranchers of northern Arizona. David and Clara Ortega of Concho were one of these pioneer Arizona sheep ranching families. David was the son of Santos and Anna Maria Ortega and Clara was the daughter of Manuel Antonio Candelaria. The prosperity of the sheep ranchers enabled other branches of the Ortega family to enter into the mercantile business. Tomas Ortega of Concho was a sheep rancher who started trading posts in Concho and Holbrook. His son Max continued the business in Lupton which grew into string of trading posts. Gilbert and Armand Ortega, grandsons of Tomas, continue the family tradition today with their Indian art businesses in Arizona. The Petrified Log Station, started by Santos Ortega as a hide warehouse for sheep ranchers and converted into a service station and store, represents the importance of the Ortega family in both the sheep industry and the mercantile industry of northern Arizona²

Petrified wood and other semi-precious stones were occasionally used as components of building facades in towns near the Petrified Forest. The Petrified Log Station represents the most elaborate example of this trend in Holbrook, and is one of the best examples in the region.

Description:

The Petrified Log Station is a one-story rectangular commercial building located on the

south side of Holbrook, Arizona. Its location along the main highway south from Holbrook enabled its owners to take advantage of the tourist trade along that route. The Petrified Wood used at the Mission Revival style facade provided it with a distinctive regional appearance which attracted business.

Until 1991, Broadway Street in Holbrook was the main highway leading south to points south, including the nearby towns of St. Johns, Snowflake, Taylor, and Show Low and the more-distant cities of Globe, Payson, and Phoenix. While most of Holbrook developed along the north side of the Little Colorado River, the Petrified Log Station was built in the Perkins Addition at the south side of the river. The bridge connecting this two-lane highway with Holbrook proper was closed in 1991, changing the Station's physical context to a quiet, dead-end street.

The small neighborhood south of the river is primarily represented by low-income residential units with a few commercial buildings built along Broadway, the main thoroughfare. Much of the land in the Perkins Addition is vacant lots, a result of the low density of development as well as the periodic flooding which has historically occurred. The Petrified Log Station is found at the west side of Broadway, near the historic location of the bridged crossing of the Little Colorado.

The Station measures approximately 50 feet square, with an addition to the rear measuring 10 feet by 40 feet. The property includes the original 50-foot frontage upon which the building sits, at the southwest corner of Broadway and Middle Avenue, as well as an additional 50 feet to the south which has been left vacant. The back half of the lots, which were originally 150 feet deep, have been sold off for residential development, leaving a 100-foot by 75-foot parcel.

The east front is set back about 10 feet from the property line, providing a total setback from the road shoulder of about 15 feet. This 10-foot area is paved with concrete, and was once a gasoline service area with dispensing pumps. The facade itself was added in 1932 to the original red sandstone building. It is divided into the lower wall, which is sheathed with petrified wood logs, and the parapet, which is stuccoed with petrified wood chips set in the plaster.

The petrified wood at the lower wall is highly decorative, and is placed such that the ends of the petrified wood "logs" are featured. The corners of the building received special treatment; large, 1-1/2-foot diameter log sections were stacked in overlap fashion, suggesting log-cabin construction. Above the level of door and window heads, a series of eleven petrified wood false vigas protrude from the stuccoed wall surface one foot. These logs average six inches in diameter.

Doors and windows at the east front are large, leaving little wall surface other than short lengths in-between, and bulkheads under the windows. The doors and windows themselves are wood, with multi-light operable transoms above the fixed panes or double doors. Today, many of these openings are boarded shut. All openings have been modified with the addition of security bars. Window sills are encrusted with petrified wood mosaio set in concrete.

The form of the parapet is characteristic of the Mission Revival style. Its curvilinear form rises symmetrically to the center. The top outline of the parapet is accentuated with a projecting coping. The front surface of the parapet originally featured a mosaic of petrified wood chips and pieces which completely encrusted the surface. Today, many of these pieces have been lost, but the original character is still apparent. Two modern electric signs have been added to the parapet, one at the center apex and a second over the north entry door.

Behind the parapet is a corrugated iron roof of simple, gabled form. The side walls on the

north and south are constructed of local red sandstone, bonded in an ashlar pattern. Foundations are indistinguishable from the walls. Four windows punctuate the north wall, one of which has been infilled; the south wall is unfenestrated. Both north and south walls have been painted.

A relatively modern concrete-block addition to the rear obscures much of the original construction. The shed roof of the addition abuts the vertical gable end of the main roof. The original back wall is of red sandstone construction matching the sides.

The interior of the building has been divided into two suites. The northern suite, 30 feet in width, most recently housed the Thunderbird Tavern. The 20-foot-wide southern suite housed a caretaker's residence. Both interiors are unremarkable, and little appears to remain of the early improvements related to a warehouse or gasoline station. The floors are exposed wood strips. Walls are plastered. The ceilings are covered with gypsum board, with the joints, for the most part, covered with batten strips. A wooden bar, pool tables, and seating booths are related to the recent tavern use. The southern suite is cluttered with many stored items.

History:

SUMMARY

The Petrified Log Station was constructed in 1925 as a hide warehouse by Santos Ortega. In 1932, Ortega converted the building into a gas station and added the petrified log facade. Ortega catered to the tourist trade with his distinctive service station as well as the local Hispanic community by operating a small grocery store and dance hall in the building until 1940. In that year the building passed into the hands of the Armijo family, who owned it for the next ten years. During the 1950's the building passed through several different owners, emerging in 1960 as the Thunderbird Tavern. Harold Cole operated the Thunderbird Tavern with his wife Margine until 1993.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Located in the Little Colorado River Valley near its confluence with the Rio Puerco River, Holbrook is the seat of government for Navajo County, created by the Territorial Legislature on March 21, 1895. The Little Colorado River Valley has long been a transportation route across northern Arizona, and the site of Holbrook has always figured prominently in any transportation plan. Holbrook got its start as a location of an early crossing of the Little Colorado River and Juan Padilla is credited with being the first non-native resident of the area in 1871. Holbrook was named for the chief construction engineer of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad, which began construction across Arizona in 1880. The rails reached Holbrook on September 24, 1881. The plat of the original townsite of Holbrook was filed on February 5, 1883, but it took over twenty years before the town grew large enough to expand beyond its original boundaries. In 1910, speculators added the Kempenich Addition, the Zuck Addition, the C.F. Perkins Addition, and re-platted the original townsite. Holbrook voters authorized incorporation of the Town of Holbrook in 1917. Holbrook achieved official city status on March 25, 1975.³

Hispanic residents played an important part in the early history of Holbrook, but for the most part their contributions are left out of the history books. Holbrook's first resident, Juan Padilla, was Hispanic, and through the following years Hispanics made significant contributions to the growth and development of Holbrook. Many of these Hispanic residents were descendants of early

New Mexico pioneers who came west as the Arizona territory opened up to settlement after the construction of the railroad. Once in Arizona, these settlers continued the traditional pursuits of sheep ranching, agriculture, and mercantile business that they had established in New Mexico. Others worked for the railroad, although these workers frequently did not have the means or education to advance to property ownership or business success. Anglo residents tended to portray all Hispanics in the same light, and the result was a lack of recognition of Hispanic contributions. Compounding the situation was the traditional rivalry between cattle ranchers and sheep ranchers. Much of the territory around Holbrook was the property of the Aztec Land and Cattle Company, known as the Hash Knife outfit after its brand. Since many of the sheep ranchers were Hispanic, the conflict between cattle and sheep men was often played out in terms of heritage. The result of this condition is that research into the history of Holbrook's Hispanic community is difficult, a situation which is similar for Hispanic residents in many other Arizona communities.⁴

THE PETRIFIED LOG STATION AND THE ORTEGA FAMILY

Santos Ortega was born in Concho, Arizona in 1896, the son of Tomas and Paublita Ortega. He moved to Holbrook as a young child and served in World War One. After the War, Santos tried his hand at homesteading in the dry sheep country of northern Arizona. In 1922, he applied for a homestead southeast of Winslow, Arizona, but he failed to make the final proof. During the early twenties, Santos helped his father Tomas in the sheep ranching business and gradually saved his money.⁵

On May 19, 1925, Santos Ortega purchased two lots in Block 111 of the C.F. Perkins Addition to Holbrook. Located along State Route 77 on the southern entrance to Holbrook, the property had good access to transportation routes. Ortega soon constructed a warehouse building out of red sandstone rock. The building served as a collection point for sheep hides, a holding center until enough hides had been accumulated for shipment on the railroad. The sheep hides were used in clothing and upholstery. Santos Ortega traveled the ranges of northern Arizona, purchasing sheep hides from the ranchers, collecting them, storing them in his warehouse until he had a large shipment, and then re-sold the hides at a profit to manufacturers in the east.⁶

Santos Ortega made a good living in the wholesale business during the 1920s, but the advent of the depression in 1929 put an end to the demand for sheep hides. Prices were down and business was slow. Santos turned to other avenues to make a living. The travel routes through northern Arizona were soon filled with travelers seeking a better life in California. Many of these depression-era migrants passed through Holbrook. Santos decided to open a service station and store to cater to the needs of the travelers and to the tourist traffic that passed through Holbrook. On September 29, 1932, Santos Ortega purchased two additional lots in Block 111 of the C.F. Perkins Addition and set to work transforming his hide warehouse into a service station. To give his building a distinctive look, Santos covered the front facade with petrified logs. These he had painstakingly amassed during his years of traveling around northern Arizona collecting hides. He built a canopy in front of the building to cover the gas pumps and converted the warehouse area into a small store. The store catered to the needs of the traveling public and also to the residents of the Hispanic community on the south side of the river. At times, the store was converted into a small dance hall during holidays and special occasions.⁷

Santos Ortega continued to run the Petrified Log Station during the thirties, but by the end of the decade he started to turn his attention to business activities north of the River. He opened a liquor store in town and in 1939 was elected to the Holbrook Town Council. He was re-elected

in 1941 and 1943. These additional responsibilities led Santos to a decision to sell the Petrified Log Station. On January 10, 1940, he sold the property to Ambrosio Armijo. Armijo had constructed a house in the Perkins Addition in 1915 and in 1936 had returned to Holbrook after selling property in Oak Creek Canyon. He used some of the proceeds from selling his ranch in Oak Creek Canyon to buy the Petrified Log Station.⁸

Ambrosio Armijo owned the Petrified Log Station for the next two years. In 1942, he gave the property to his adopted son Pedro R. (Pete) Armijo. Ambrosio had two adopted sons, Albert and Pete. Albert was a farmer in the Salt River Valley and Ambrosio helped him get his start. Pete demonstrated a flair for business so Ambrosio helped him start a business of his own. Pete acquired the Petrified Log Station on February 3, 1942. Pete owned the Station for the next ten years, and it continued to meet the needs of the traveling public as well as the local community.⁹

Pete Armijo sold the property in 1950 and it passed through several different ownerships during the 1950s. Frank Adair operated a sporting goods store in the building until 1955 when A.L. (Tony) Martinez obtained a beer license. Martinez converted the building into a tavern by 1960 and obtained a liquor license. Ownership then passed to D.G. Noel who opened the Thunderbird Tavern in the building.¹⁰

During the 1960s, the Thunderbird Tavern was operated by Harold and Margine Cole, an African American couple originally from Texas. The Coles also operated a tavern in Winslow - the Prairie Moon - and Cole's Liquors in Pinetop. Many African Americans came to northern Arizona in 1924 to work at the lumber town of McNary. After the sawmill closed down, many continued to live in northern Arizona, migrating to jobs in Winslow, Holbrook, and Pinetop-Lakeside. Although the Coles had a substantial African American clientele, the Thunderbird Tavern served the Anglo and Hispanic communities in Holbrook as well. The diversity of the patrons was reflected in the slogan for the Thunderbird Tavern: "The tavern where everybody goes." On September 19, 1962, the original license for the Tavern was transferred to Harold Cole and on February 5, 1969 he transferred the license to his wife Margine. The Coles experienced some difficulty in buying the property, but obtained it in 1970. The Coles continued to operate the Thunderbird Tavern until 1993, when Margine died and Harold suffered a stroke.¹¹

ENDNOTES

1. For an overview of the tourism in Holbrook, see Ryden Architects, A Historic Resource Survey of Holbrook, Arizona (Phoenix: Don W. Ryden, AIA/Architects, 1991), pages 30-32.
2. For background on the Ortega family in Concho, see Pat H. Stain, Historic Resource Survey of Concho, Arizona (Flagstaff: SWCA, 1992).
3. For an overview of the history of Holbrook, see Ryden Architects, A Historic Resource Survey of Holbrook, Arizona (Phoenix: Don W. Ryden, AIA/Architects, 1991), pages 27-29.
4. For a discussion of the sources available on Hispanic history in Arizona, see Ryden Architects, An Historic Building Analysis of the Elias/Rodriguez House, Tempe, Arizona (Phoenix: Don W. Ryden, AIA/Architects, 1992), page 8.

5. For information on Santos Ortega, see his obituary "S. Ortega, Was Holbrook Councilman," Arizona Republic (Phoenix newspaper), April 1, 1972 (l, 45: 3). Information on Ortega's homestead was obtained from Phoenix Serial File 053416, on file at the Arizona State Office of the Bureau of Land Management, Phoenix.
6. On the property acquisition, see Book 15 of Deeds, Page 640, recorded May 19, 1935, Navajo County Recorder's Office. Information on the business obtained in an interview with Santos Ortega, Jr.
7. On the property acquisition, see Book 22 of Deeds, Page 278, recorded September 29, 1932, Navajo County Recorder's Office. Information on the conversion obtained during an interview with Santos Ortega, Jr.
8. On the property transaction, see Book 28 of Deeds, Page 371, recorded January 10, 1940, Navajo County Recorder's Office. On Santos Ortega's three terms on the Holbrook Town Council, see the Holbrook Tribune-News: "Ten Candidates File Petitions City Election," May 12, 1939 (l, 1: 7); "Leckron, Park, Ortega, Hancock, Taylor Win," May 26, 1939 (l, 1: 7); "Councilmen Meet and Canvass Votes," June 6, 1941 (l, 1: 3); "Town's Councilmen Nominations Close; 5 Incumbents File," April 16, 1943 (l, 1: 1-2); "Mayor J.M. Park Re-elected with 42 of 45 Ballots Cast," May 28, 1943 (l, 1: 6-7); "Register Today for Town Election," May 18, 1945 (l, 1: 5). For information on the Armijo family, see the HABS report prepared on the Armijo House by Ryden Architects, 1993.
9. Information obtained from Book 30 of Deeds, Page 318, recorded February 3, 1942, Navajo County Recorder's Office and through interviews with Vicky Garcia and Manuel Armijo.
10. Property transactions from Book 40 of Deeds, Page 394 (Pedro R. Armijo to Franklin R. Adair), recorded January 31, 1950; Book 69 of Deeds, Page 82 (Franklin R. Adair to A.L. Martinez), recorded May 23, 1955; Book 137 of Deeds, Page 368 (A.L. Martinaz to Elford Holmes), recorded January 5, 1961, all in the Navajo County Recorder's Office.
11. Information on the Thunderbird Tavern obtained from the Arizona Department of Liquor Licenses and Control, file no. 06090009 and from an interview with Harold Cole, August 18, 1993.

Sources:

Research into the history of the Petrified Log Station concentrated on primary sources, as references to the Ortega and Armijo families in secondary works are rare. Of these primary sources, interviews with descendants of the Ortega and Armijo families proved very valuable. Family members were gracious of their time and generous with their information. Specific citations to reference materials are included in the endnotes. This section gives a summary of the repositories consulted and is followed by a bibliography.

Arizona Department of Library, Archives, and Public Records

The archives section on the fourth floor contains Navajo County court records and marriage records which provided some information on the Ortega family. The research collection contains newspapers which were useful for obtaining biographical information. Census

records on microfilm proved very valuable in placing specific individuals at the property. Holbrook city directories helped to establish ownership and property use at specific points in time.

Arizona Department of Transportation

Bettina Rosenberg provided copies of historical reports on a bridge replacement project in the vicinity of the Petrified Log Station.

Arizona Department of Liquor Licenses and Control

Provided records on liquor licenses issued to the owners of the Thunderbird Tavern.

Arizona State Historic Preservation Office

Provided a copy of the historical report on Concho which contained information on the Ortega family.

Navajo County

The Navajo County Recorder's Office provided information about property transactions which helped to trace ownership. The Assessor's Office houses some property ownership information as well as property valuations. The Clerk of the Court provided probate records.

Bureau of Land Management

Contains homestead patent information in the Arizona State Office.

Navajo County Historical Society, Holbrook Branch

Ms. Garnette Franklin provided photographs of the property and historical information on the Ortega and Armijo families.

Arizona Historical Society, Tucson

Robert Fisher provided leads on sources of biographical information.

Sharlot Hall Museum, Prescott

Michael Wurtz provided biographical information.

City of Holbrook

Provided information on burials in Holbrook Cemetery which assisted in obtaining dates for obituary research. Provided information on the dates Santos Ortega served on the Holbrook Town Council.

Arizona State University

The Arizona Historical Foundation contains some census information and biographical references. The Arizona Collection in Hayden Library has some biographical information.

Interviews

John Colligan, Las Cruces (information on Armijo genealogy)
Santos Ortega, Jr., (Lucy Ortega's son)
Willie Baca (Pete Armijo's brother)
Vicky Garcia (Ambrosio Armijo's granddaughter)
Natalie Sanchez (Ambrosio Armijo's granddaughter)
Manuel Armijo (Ambrosio Armijo's grandson)

Anita Scarbrough (Lucy Ortega's niece)
Louis Maestas (Lucy Ortega's nephew)
Adelle Mescal (Lucy Ortega's niece)
Tony Martinez (owned Petrified Log Station)
Frank Adair (owned Petrified Log Station)
Suzie Paulsell (widow of Tony Ortega)
Harold Cole (owned Thunderbird Tavern)

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A Historic Building Analysis of the Elias/Rodriguez House, Tempe, Arizona (Phoenix: Don W. Ryden, AIA/Architects, 1992)

A Historic Resource Survey of Sedona, Arizona (Phoenix: Don W. Ryden, AIA/Architects, 1992)

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Wayte, Harold Columbus

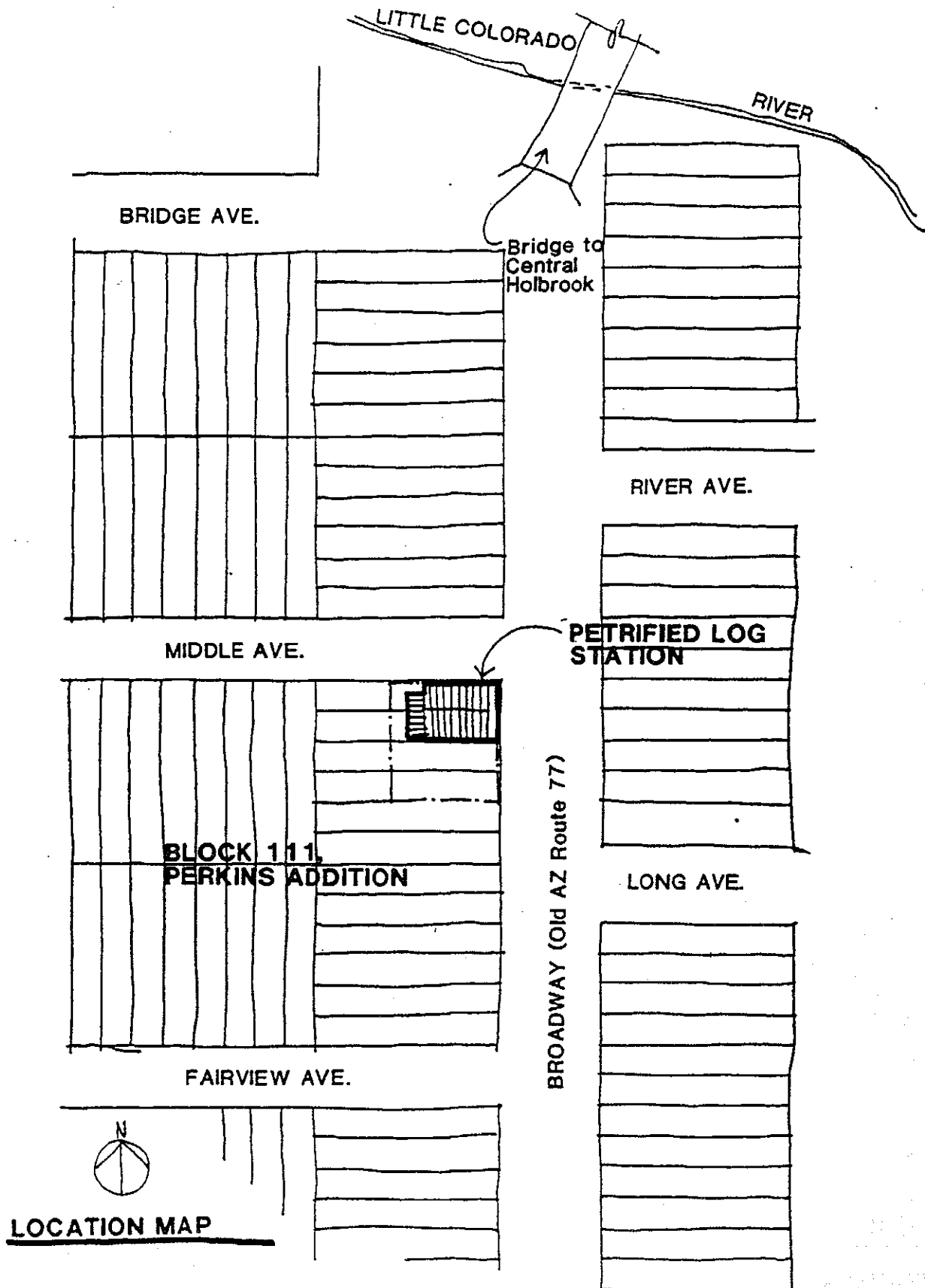
"A History of Holbrook and the Little Colorado Country, 1540-1962," M.A. Thesis, University of Arizona, 1962.

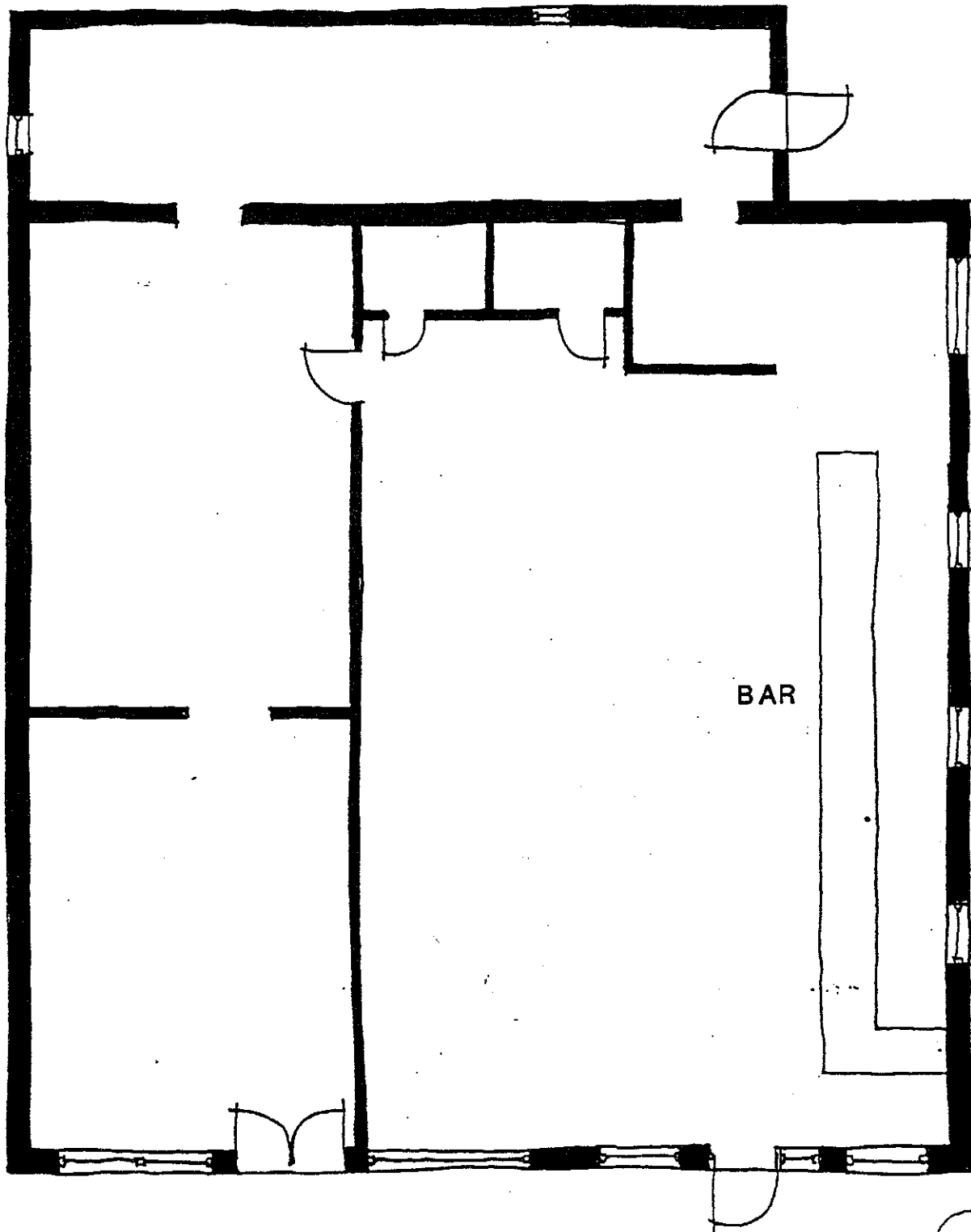
Historian: Robert G. Graham, Ryden Architects, Historical Architect/Project Coordinator

Douglas Kupel, Consulting Historian

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November, 1993





PETRIFIED LOG STATION FLOOR PLAN
(Thunderbird Tavern)

SCALE 1/8"=1'
8/18/93

